

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY BONN PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 015943

FOLLOWING REPEAT WARSAW 9298 ACTION SECSTATE INFO BELGRADE BERLIN
BUCHAREST BUDAPEST MOSCOW PRAGUE MUNICH DEC 22.

QUOTE C O N F I D E N T I A L WARSAW 9298

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PROP PINT PL XH

SUBJ: EVALUATION OF RFE BROADCASTING TO POLAND

REF: WARSAW 2515

1. DURING THE PERIOD SINCE THE EMBASSY'S LAST EVALUATION (REF),
RFE HAS CONTINUED TO PROVIDE COVERAGE OF BOTH INTERNAL AND
EXTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS OTHERWISE UNOBTAINABLE TO POLISH LISTENERS.
THE STATION FILLS GAPS AND OFFSETS TILTS AND DISTORTIONS IN WHAT
IS PRESENTED BY THE DOMESTIC MEDIA AND PERFORMS A FUNCTION NOT
DUPLICATED BY ANY OTHER OUTSIDE BROADCASTER. IN THIS CONNECTION,
RFE'S PROGRAMS ON CENSORED NEWS, INCLUDING ITS DISSEMINATION OF
MATERIAL FROM UNDERGROUND PUBLICATIONS SUCH AS KOR COMMUNIQUEES,
ZAPIS, AND OPINIA, REPRESENT AN ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT SUPPLEMENT
TO WHAT THE POLISH REGIME OFFERS IN PRINT AND ON THE AIR. WE
ALSO CONTINUE TO BE IMPRESSED BY THE QUICKNESS OF THE STATION'S
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 STATE 015943

REACTION TIME IN COVERING POLISH INTERNAL EVENTS UNREPORTED,
OR UNDER-REPORTED, LOCALLY.

2. ALTHOUGH IT IS DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE ITS SIZE AND COMPOSITION
ACCURATELY, RFE'S POLISH AUDIENCE, PARTICULARLY IF THOSE WHO
LISTEN ONLY OCCASIONALLY ARE INCLUDED, IS PROBABLY QUITE LARGE.
A SUBSTANTIAL PROPORTION OF OUR POLISH CONTACTS -- NOTABLY,

PEOPLE TAKING ISSUE TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER WITH THE REGIME, BUT BY NO MEANS ONLY SUCH INDIVIDUALS -- SAY THEY LISTEN TO THE STATION AT LEAST SOME OF THE TIME. MOST OF THEM AGREE THAT RFE GIVES THEM AN ADDED DIMENSION OF INFORMATION ON WHAT IS GOING ON IN POLAND AND ELSEWHERE.

3. THAT BEING SAID, HOWEVER, IN RECENT MONTHS MANY OF THESE SAME LISTENERS HAVE GONE ON TO VOLUNTEER SEVERE JUDGEMENTS ON RFE COMMENTARY. WE HAVE REPEATEDLY HEARD COMPLAINTS ABOUT HEAVILY POLEMICAL, DIDACTIC, AND SUPERFLUOUS EDITORIAL OBSERVATIONS WHEN STRAIGHT REPORTAGE WOULD HAVE SUFFICED. ONE OUT-SPOKEN DISSIDENT SAID HE HAD STOPPED LISTENING TO RFE ON THAT ACCOUNT, EVEN THOUGH HE FELT DISTINCTLY LESS WELL-INFORMED AS A RESULT. NO ONE ELSE WE HAVE TALKED TO ON THE SUBJECT HAS GONE THAT FAR. HOWEVER, CONSULATE POZNAN RECENTLY SENT US THE REPORT OF A US EXCHANGE STUDENT TO THE EFFECT THAT MOST OF HER POLISH STUDENT FRIENDS REGARD RFE COMMENTARIES AS ON THE SAME PLANE AS THOSE OF POLISH RADIO -- I.E., EITHER GROUNDS FOR TURNING OFF THE SET OR, AT LEAST, RAW MATERIAL FOR A JOKE. IN GENERAL, WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT RESENTMENT MAY BE QUITE WIDESPREAD AMONG LISTENERS OVER WHAT THEY REGARD AS GRATUITOUS, IF NOT INSULTING, OBSERVATIONS BY OUTSIDERS -- EVEN THOUGH OF POLISH BACKGROUND -- DIRECTED AT AN AUDIENCE WITHIN THE COUNTRY THAT FEELS ENTIRELY ABLE TO MAKE ITS OWN INTERPRETATION OF EVENTS, JUST SO LONG AS IT IS GIVEN THE FACTS ABOUT THEM.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 STATE 015943

4. IN VIEW OF RECURRENT CRITICISM ALONG THESE LINES FROM QUITE DIVERSE MEMBERS OF THE RFE AUDIENCE, WE HELD UP THIS EVALUATION REPORT TO TAKE A SECOND LOOK AT A REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLING OF SCRIPTS FROM THE PERIOD IT COVERS (APRIL THROUGH OCTOBER). ON THE BASIS OF THIS REVIEW, IT SEEMS TO US THAT A NUMBER OF SCRIPTS CONTAINED MATERIAL WHICH, TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER, JUSTIFIED THE CRITICISM. BESIDES THOSE SCRIPTS WHOSE TONE AND APPROACH SEEMED NEEDLESSLY POLEMICAL, OTHERS INCLUDED EDITORIAL INSERTS OR TAGLINES THAT BELABORED THE OBVIOUS OR INDULGED IN RHETORICAL EXAGGERATION. AN EXAMPLE OF THE FIRST CATEGORY: FACTS AND VIEWS NO. 5402 OF OCTOBER 5, WHICH WE THINK POLEMICIZED TOO HEAVILY WITH POLITYKA EDITOR RAKOWSKI OVER A QUESTION (THE EXISTENCE OF CENSORSHIP) ABOUT WHICH THE POLISH LISTENER HAS NO DOUBT WHATSOEVER. EXAMPLES OF THE SECOND: (A) (A) FACTS AND VIEWS NO. 5355 OF AUGUST 11, CONCERNING A PROTEST LETTER FROM THE GDANSK SHIPYARD -- IT IS EXAGGERATED TO SAY, "NOTHING HAS CHANGED IN PEOPLE'S POLAND, EVEN AFTER THE END OF THE SAD ERA OF MOCZAR'S AND GOMULKA'S RULE." (B) FACTS AND VIEWS NO. 5370 OF AUGUST 29 -- THE QUESTION, "BUT HOW DOES ONE REFER TO A STATE WHICH KEEPS INTRODUCING NEW FORMS OF BOOSTING PRICES AND EXTORTING MONEY FROM THE CITIZENS?" SEEMS UNNECESSARILY INFLAMMATORY. (C) FACTS AND VIEWS NO. 5406 OF OCTOBER 10,

NOTING THE ABSENCE OF DOMESTIC REPORTS ON WORK STOPPAGES IN SILESIA AND ACUTE FOOD SHORTAGES -- THE TAGLINE "AS IF (THESE)... WERE NOT...WORTH MENTIONING" -- SEEMS A CLUMSILY OBVIOUS EFFORT TO SCORE OFF THE CENSORED LOCAL MEDIA THAT DETRACTS FROM A WORTHWHILE REPORT ON A SIGNIFICANT INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT.

5. IT THUS WOULD APPEAR ADVISABLE FOR RFE EDITORS TO KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON COMMENTARY MATERIAL, WHETHER IT TAKES THE FORM OF AN ENTIRE SCRIPT OR INSERTION INTO WHAT ESSENTIALLY IS A NEWS REPORT, AND RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO SCORE EASY DEBATING POINTS. THIS, OF COURSE, SHOULD NOT IN THE LEAST PRECLUDE FAIR COMMENT AND ANALYSIS, MUCH OF WHICH WE FIND THE RADIO DOES PERCEPTIVELY AND KNOWLEDGEABLY. BUT, ON THE BASIS OF WHAT WE KEEP HEARING FROM LISTENERS, MANY OF THEM, BE IT NOTED, MORE OR LESS FAVORABLY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 STATE 015943

DISPOSED TOWARD RFE'S VIEWPOINTS, IT SEEMS THAT THE MORE DISPASSIONATELY FACTUAL THE TREATMENT, THE GREATER THE RECEPTIVITY TO THE MESSAGE THAT MAY BE EXPLICITLY OR IMPLICITLY PRESENT.

6. WITH REGARD TO RFE COVERAGE OF ESPECIALLY SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND THEMES DURING THE PERIOD IN QUESTION, (A) WE THINK THE DIFFICULT PROBLEMS PRESENTED BY THE PYJAS CASE WERE ON THE WHOLE HANDLED WELL. FACTS AND VIEWS NOS. 5275, 5279, AND 5281 (MAY 10, 14, AND 17, RESPECTIVELY) REPRESENT INFORMATIVE REPORTING AND FAIR COMMENT, IF A BIT SHRILL, ON THE KRAKOW STUDENT'S MYSTERIOUS DEATH AND THE REACTION OF HIS FELLOW STUDENTS. ALSO, FACTS AND VIEWS NO. 5402 (OCTOBER 5) LEGITIMATELY RECALLED QUESTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE CASE WHICH REMAINED UNANSWERED WHEN THE OFFICIAL INVESTIGATION WAS TERMINATED. (B) REPORTAGE AND ANALYSIS OF THE JULY 22 AMNESTY WAS GENERALLY ACCURATE, BUT SOMEWHAT REPETITIOUS. IT DID APPROPRIATELY GIVE THE REGIME CREDIT FOR A CREDITABLE ACTION AND, AT THE SAME TIME (E.G., FACTS AND VIEWS NO. 5341, JULY 26), POINTED TO THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ASPECT OF THE AMNESTY -- THE RELEASE OF THE IMPRISONED RADOM AND URSUS WORKERS AND KOR ACTIVISTS -- ONE THAT WAS MUTED BY THE REGIME. SOME OF THE TREATMENT A FEW DAYS LATER, HOWEVER, TENDED TOWARD POLEMICS (E.G., FACTS AND VIEWS NO. 5346, AUGUST 1).

(C) COVERAGE OF DISSENT GENERALLY -- AND REGIME REACTION, INCLUDING POLICE HARRASSMENT -- WAS VERY THOROUGH, INFORMATIVE, AND REASONABLY EVEN-HANDED AS FAR AS THE DISSENTERS THEMSELVES WERE CONCERNED. A MEMBER OF THE MOVEMENT FOR THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN AND CIVIL RIGHTS (ROPCO) RECENTLY ALLEGED TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT RFE WAS A SELF-APPOINTED ADVOCATE FOR KOR, BUT, DURING A CONSIDERABLE PART OF THE PERIOD IN QUESTION, KOR WAS WHERE MOST OF THE DISSIDENT ACTION WAS. WE THINK THERE HAS BEEN A TREND TOWARD QUANTITATIVE BALANCE IN THE STATION'S
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 STATE 015943

COVERAGE OF KOR AND ROPCO AND OTHER DISSIDENT GROUPS AS THE ACTIVITIES OF THESE GROUPS INCREASED. ANOTHER ROPCO SOURCE TOLD US, HOWEVER, THAT HE WISHED RFE WOULD DEVOTE MORE ATTENTION TO THE MOVEMENT'S ACTIVITIES AND LESS TO ITS JOURNAL, OPINIA. AS NOTED, WE THINK OPINIA EXCERPTS ARE A VALUABLE COMPONENT OF NEWS THE POLISH LISTENER OTHERWISE WON'T GET. (INCIDENTALLY, VIRTUALLY THE ONLY LOCAL MEDIA ATTACK ON RFE IN RECENT MONTHS WAS MOUNTED IN CONNECTION WITH THE FINING OF ROPCO ACTIVIST LESZEK MOCZULSKI FOR PASSING "DISINFORMATION" ON SILESIAN MINERS' STRIKES TO THE STATION VIA WESTERN NEWSMEN IN WARSAW)

(E) FACTS AND VIEWS NO. 5418 (OCTOBER 24) PROVIDED AN EXCELLENT ANALYSIS OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF PERMITS FOR NEW CHURCH CONSTRUCTION IN THE WARSAW AREA, RAISING THE VALID QUESTION (AS YET UNANSWERED) WHETHER THE LIBERALIZED POLICY WOULD EXTEND TO OTHER PARTS OF POLAND. (F) BESIDES THE STATION'S GENERALLY USEFUL COVERAGE OF DOMESTIC LABOR AFFAIRS, THERE WAS SOME TIMELY REPORTING ON EFFORTS IN THE WEST TO DEAL WITH UNEMPLOYMENT. THIS SHOULD HAVE HELPED BLUNT REGIME ALLEGATIONS OF WESTERN UNCONCERN ABOUT "ECONOMIC HUMAN RIGHTS" -- A LINE TAKEN BY THE EAST BLOC AT THE BELGRADE CSCE REVIEW CONFERENCE AND ECHOED IN LOCAL MEDIA.

7. IN SUM, WE THINK RFE'S BROADCASTING TO POLAND IS STRONG IN ITS STRAIGHT NEWS REPORTING AND SOME OF ITS ANALYSIS, BUT APPARENTLY INEFFECTIVE WITH MANY LISTENERS WHEN IT TAKES ON A MORE OVERTLY PROPAGANDISTIC OR POLEMICAL CAST. BECAUSE OF ITS UNIQUE INFORMATIONAL ROLE, THE RADIO PROBABLY WILL NOT LOSE MOST OF THOSE LISTENERS ENTIRELY. HOWEVER, IN THE INTEREST OF OVERCOMING THIS DISAFFECTION AND FOR REASONS OF STATION IMAGE AND CREDIBILITY, A HARD LOOK AT CURRENT PRECEPTS ON EDITORIAL POLICY AND STYLE WOULD CLEARLY SEEM TO BE INDICATED.
DAVIES UNQUOTE
CHRISTOPHER

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